

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4020

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

S E C R E T AMMAN 1662

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, ECIN, ECON, SY, JO, XF

SUBJECT: SYRIAN- JORDANIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS

1. RIFAI BRIEFED AMBASSADOR ON BILATERAL RESULTS OF HIS TALKS WITH SYRIANS WHICH TENDED TO FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS. IN ADDITION TO PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED ARRANGEMENTS AND COMMISSIONS (TEXT FBIS), RIFAI NOTED THE FOLLOWING.

2. JORDAN ARRIVED WITH A WORKING PAPER WHICH SUGGESTED A NUMBER OF PROJECTS IN WHICH JORDAN HAD A REAL INTEREST. SYRIAN WORKING LEVEL DELEGATION ACCEPTED ONE-HALF OF THE PROPOSALS AND REJECTED THE OTHER HALF. RIFAI ASKED IF HE COULD PRESENT THE REJECTED HALF TO ASSAD AND LATTER AFTER SOME DISCUSSION APPARENTLY AGREED TO ALL OF JORDAN'S PROPOSALS.

3. RIFAI NOTED THAT SYRIAN WORKING LEVEL STRONGLY RESISTED JORDANIAN PROPOSAL TO REVIVE THE MAQARIN DAM PROJECT. ASSAD ASKED WHAT WERE THE SYRIAN ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT AND WAS TOLD THERE WERE TWO:

(A) IT WAS ONLY 1.5 KILOMETERS FROM NEAREST ISRAELI OCCUPIED TERRITORY AND WOULD BECOME THE OBJECT OF AN

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ISRAELI ATTACK, AND (B) IT WAS IN A MILITARY ZONE

AND SINCE FOREIGNERS WOULD PARTICIPATE IN BUILDING IT, THE DAM WOULD PROVIDE A SECURITY DANGER FOR SYRIA. ASSAD ASKED RIFAI FOR HIS COUNTER ARGUMENTS. RIFAI SAID THAT ON (A) THE U.S. AND IBRD WOULD BE PLAYING A LEADING ROLE ON THE DAM PROJECT AND IF THEY DID SO, THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO ATTACK OR DESTROY IT. ON (B), SINCE THE JORDANIANS ALREADY WERE ON THE SOUTH BANK OF THE YARMOUK AND FOREIGN EXPERTS ALREADY HAD ACCESS TO THAT BANK, THERE WOULD BE LITTLE OR NO SECURITY DANGER TO SYRIA BY AGREEING TO LET THE DAM BE BUILT. ASSAD AGREED AND INSTRUCTED THAT SYRIA WOULD GIVE FULL COOPERATION. RIFAI SAID HE THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER TROUBLE WITH SYRIA.

4. RIFAI NOTED THAT SOME OF THE ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS WOULD BE KEPT SECRET, PARTLY BECAUSE THE SYRIANS WOULD HAVE SERIOUS PROBLEMS AT HOME IF THEY WERE NOT. ONE CONCERNED THE REMOVAL OF ALL RESTRICTIONS ON JORDAN TRUCKS TRANSITTING SYRIA. SYRIAN TRUCKERS WOULD DEMONSTRATE IF THIS WERE KNOWN, SAID RIFAI. THIS IS SUPPOSED TO GO INTO EFFECT VERY SOON (NEXT FEW DAYS) AND SYRIA IS SUPPOSED TO TAKE CARE OF THOSE ALONG THE BORDER WHO NORMALLY CHECK AND CONTROL SUCH TRAFFIC.

5. ON TRANSPORTATION, SYRIA WILL LOOK INTO PROVIDING A THIRD RAIL FOR ITS WIDER GAUGE TRAFFIC ON THE LINE TO AQABA. SYRIANS ALSO SAID THEY ARE WILLING TO DEVELOP FURTHER PORT OF TARTOUS FOR SHIPPING PHOSPHATE, AND IF JORDAN COULD GUARANTEE 1.0 M TONS PER YEAR, A NEW, SEPARATE RAIL LINE MIGHT BE FEASIBLE.

6. RIFAI SAYS THAT SYRIANS HAVE AGREED TO SHOW JORDAN THEIR NEXT FIVE YEAR PLAN (1976-1981) AND TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ANY AREAS OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT.

7. RIFAI SAYS HE IS DETERMINED TO CONTINUE TO PUT NEW JORDAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS ON FIRM BASIS OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION, RATHER THAN TO DEPEND TOO MUCH ON POLITICAL AND MILITARY ARRANGEMENTS. HE SEES LONG TERM ECONOMIC COOPERATION AS PROVIDING A MORE SOLID AND ENDURING BASIS

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FOR WORKING TOGETHER.
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